





*Unanimity among the Members of the Church essential to
her Prosperity and Peace:*

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN

ST. JAMES'S CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA,

On the 23d of May, 1814,

BEFORE THE

**CONVENTION OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL
CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES.**

BY THE REV. JOHN CROES, D. D.,

Rector of Christ Church, New Brunswick, New Jersey, and President of
the House of Clerical and Lay Deputies.

PUBLISHED BY ORDER OF THE CONVENTION.

PHILADELPHIA,

PUBLISHED BY BRADFORD AND INSKEEP.

G. Palmer, printer.

1814.

500



SERMON, &c.

2D CORINTHIANS, xiii. 11.

Be of one mind.

THE religion, which we have the happiness to enjoy, is distinguished from all other systems, not only by the wisdom and sublimity of its doctrines, but also by the excellency of its moral precepts. In comprehensiveness, in consistency with reason, and in purity, its morality has no rival. Not a single rule does it contain, for the government of our passions, and the regulation of our conduct, which, on the strictest investigation, will not be found worthy of a divine Legislator, and productive of individual and social happiness. It peremptorily prohibits the indulgence of the inordinately sensual, the selfish, and the malevolent feelings of the human heart; and calls for, and cherishes, that just, pure, generous, humane, and amiable disposition, which, depraved as we are, we are compelled not only to approve, but admire.

As professors of this holy religion, it is unquestionably implied, that we live under the influence of its precepts, that we conscientiously avoid what they prohibit, and as cordially perform what they require. But though this ought to be the consequence of our faith and profession; though, indeed, in our initiation into this holy system, we solemnly vowed to conform to the directions of its Divine Author; yet, such is our depravity, such the strong bias in our nature to vice, that the beauty of

holiness, however acknowledged in speculation, however binding upon us, is too seldom manifested in our practice. Hence arises the necessity, in the phraseology of scripture, “of line upon line, and precept upon precept:”—the necessity, that this holy religion should not only be constantly taught, but as constantly inculcated upon its professors.

As I stand before you, my brethren, for this solemn purpose; permit me to call your attention to the subject of one of its important precepts, which has just been read to you: “Be of one mind.”

I have selected this precept, not that I would have it inferred, that there is less unanimity in our church, than is common to christian societies (though it must be confessed, that there is too little among all); but because it is so indispensably necessary to the well being and prosperity of every religious body, that it cannot too frequently, nor too forcibly be impressed upon its-members, as well ministers, as people.

In endeavouring to illustrate and enforce this precept, there are two views, in which I shall consider it: its meaning; and its advantages.

Unanimity in the church, especially implies, that its members hold the same doctrines. In other words, that they all sincerely believe, what is contained in the holy scriptures, and is set forth in the articles and creeds of that venerable institution. This implies again, that they reject all doctrines, as heretical or false, which are not warranted by the plain letter of revelation, and are not interwoven in the formularies of the church.

But unanimity does not stop here. It must be extended also to the discipline, the mode of worship, and the usages of the church. We cannot be said to be of

one mind, if some of us entertain opinions relative to the origin, orders, and authority of the priesthood, different from those, which have been uniformly held by that respectable body.

Neither can those be considered as of one mind with their brethren, who, in despite of her authority, forsake her mode of worship; or mar its beauty, by intentional omissions, innovations, or imagined improvements;—that mode, which has stood the test of ages, and has become venerable from its antiquity, and its intrinsic excellence.

It cannot be asserted, either, that the members of the church are of the same mind, if a part of them cease to respect the canons, which have been adopted in her councils, for the general regulation of her affairs: if, indeed, they obey or disobey them, as it suits their fancies or inclinations.

The same remark is true of those inconsiderate members, who introduce new modes, or forms of their own invention, in addition, or in opposition, to the long-established usages of the church; which usages, though not sanctioned by canons, ought not to be departed from without very urgent reasons.

All departures, indeed, from prescribed modes and forms, however much they may please men's fancies, or gratify their vain glory, are injurious to that unanimity, which the apostle so pointedly recommends; not only because the dissimilarity of the modes, between different congregations, naturally tends to disunion, and gives occasion for the members to say, "I am of Paul and I of Apollos;" but, because those ministers, who feel themselves restrained by their ordination vows from violating the canons, or departing from the usages of the church,

cannot but be displeased, and even hurt, at the liberty which their brethren take, and often to their disadvantage.

Besides ; if one may take the liberty to introduce one new mode or form, another may take the same liberty to introduce another ; a third, a third one, according as it suits each one's notions of expediency or utility. Now, what, I ask, would be the consequence if such conduct was pursued ? Certainly not that, which the apostle recommends in the text ; but that, which he so severely reproveth, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, and entreats them to correct. "I beseech you, brethren," says he, "by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you ; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul ; and I of Apollos ; and I of Cephas ; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided ? Was Paul crucified for you ? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul ?"

But there is another and a higher sense, in which christians should be of one mind. I mean, in their zeal and endeavours to practise and promote the great duties of their religion ; and, of consequence, to advance the interests of the church. Such was the union of sentiment, which the apostle had more particularly in view, and without which, unanimity, in inferior respects, will be of little value.

Whenever therefore the members of a religious association, especially its ministers, direct their principal attention to these great objects ; when they are suitably impressed with their worth and importance ; when, keeping

personal interest, ambition, and vain glory, out of view, they bend the great efforts of their minds to the promotion of the glory of their Lord and Master, and to the interest and prosperity of his body the church; when, under the influence of these high considerations, they are kindly affectioned one to another, in honour preferring each other; then, and only then, holding the doctrines, and adhering to the laws and usages of their communion, they may be said to be of one mind, in the sense intended by the apostle. Pursuing this course, they also truly obey his injunction, "to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Should it be said, that however proper and desirable a unanimity so perfect would be; yet, considering the great difference in the intellectual endowments of different men, and the frailty of human nature, it can hardly be expected.

I answer, that though some difference of opinion, on doctrinal points, among the members of the church, may be the consequence of the disparity in the human intellect, and the defect in its cultivation; yet those, especially ministers, who cannot precisely agree with the established doctrines, ought not to disturb the unity of the church, by calling in question the truth of her principles.

Such persons should, at least, respect opinions, which have been sanctioned for ages, by a succession of learned, wise, and pious men; and rather doubt the correctness of their own views. At any rate, if, on the maturest deliberation, they think they cannot consistently withhold their sentiments, it would be far better to withdraw from her communion, than to disturb her union and peace. Nothing less, however, than the most urgent cause can justify even this step.

The same observations will apply to those members, who are not entirely pleased with the mode of worship, which the church has adopted, or fancy they can amend or improve her liturgy ; and to those who are dissatisfied with any of her canons and usages ; with this difference, however, that, as modes of worship, canons, and usages are not particularly pointed out in scripture, but are the results of human wisdom, the same excuse cannot be offered, for their separation from the church on these accounts ; unless such persons can shew, that they are contrary to the word of God. At all events, the interest and union of the church require, that they should either conform, or withdraw, whatever may be the consequence of the latter to themselves.

The frailty of human nature, it must be confessed, is a great obstacle to that perfect union of hearts, that singleness and disinterestedness of views and conduct, which, spurning at our own petty interests, and desires of popularity and eminence, seeks only, or chiefly, the advancement of the cause of Christ, and the eternal welfare of our christian brethren. But what else was the design of our union, under the great head of the church ; what of those divine influences, which he procured for our sanctification, unless to enable us to overcome this obstacle, to correct the depravity, and strengthen the weakness of our nature ; and thus to produce that “ communion of saints,” which is the perfection of the christian state ?

The advantages of unanimity come next under consideration.

In every association, whether for temporal or spiritual purposes, unity of sentiment and action is considered indispensable to its prosperity and usefulness ; because such unity gives it strength, confers on it dignity—promotes

affection, and consequently peace, among its members,—puts down, or silences opposition,—and, if it be instituted expressly for religious purposes, it checks the progress of vice and immorality within the sphere of its influence,—and causes it to enjoy, in an eminent degree, the presence and favour of the great Head of the church.

Strength is a property, in all communities, deservedly esteemed. Without it, no social institution can be of much utility, or have a long duration. Without strength, indeed, it may be productive of much mischief. The same institution, possessing the qualities of power and energy, is, on the contrary, capable of great and useful undertakings;—it may do much good. The strength of a society consists principally in the number, influence, and virtues of its members. Unanimity tends not only to increase these; but is, in itself, in the place of number, compared with societies, where contention or division prevails.

Unanimity also confers dignity on an association. It is the evidence of wisdom and virtue, especially of the virtue of magnanimity and disinterestedness among its members: and these are qualities, which always command the respect and esteem of beholders.

Mutual affection, and consequently peace, are likewise effects of unanimity, in religious communities. Nothing is so productive of a union of hearts, as a union of sentiments. To think alike, to pursue the same object by the same means, to make our individual views and interests give way to the views and interests of the whole, to throw, as it were, all our virtues, and all our exertions into a common stock for mutual benefit; what else could result from such condescension, such self denial, but mutual love, and its attendant peace? And are not these

among the most distinguished blessings of indulgent Heaven?

Harmony in the church tends also to put down, or silence opposition. Infidels, heretics, and other enemies, avail themselves of every argument, within the scope of their ingenuity and observation, to discredit revelation, or to bring our holy religion, certain important doctrines of it, or our particular church into disrepute. In none, are they more successful, than in those, which they derive from the imprudences and follies of discordant dioceses, or congregations. To deprive them of this weapon therefore is of vast importance, not only to our religious community, but to the universal church. This can be effected only by removing the cause; by making harmony succeed to discord; unanimity to division.

Again: being of one mind in the church, tends to check the progress of vice, within the sphere of its influence. This excellent quality among its members, puts out of countenance every species of gross and public immorality; and renders religion so dignified, and, at the same time, so amiable, that even the dissipated and profligate cannot but revere it; and even secretly desire to be under the influence of principles, so excellent in themselves, and so productive of happiness to the community: and indeed, by the blessing of God upon such instructive and affecting examples, persons of this description are often happily brought from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

But the greatest good resulting to the church, or to any section of it, from unanimity among its members, is the especial presence and favour of its divine head, the Lord Jesus Christ. For where two or three are gathered together, in his name, he has declared, that he is in the

midst of them. In other words, that every religious association, however small, whose members are cordially united, on truly christian principles, for the worship of God, the promotion of his glory, and the eternal welfare of men, enjoys the presence of their beneficent Lord; who, by his Spirit, excites their devotion, directs and prospers their counsels, warms their breasts with mutual love, and inspires them with that wisdom, which cometh down from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality, and without hypocrisy. What benefit, more valuable than this, can men enjoy? From what source can they derive such inestimable favours, but from the Lord of life, the author of their existence and salvation? And to possess his approbation, his presence, in the highest sense of the terms, is the consequence only of unanimity, as well as zeal and faithfulness in his service.

But the royal psalmist has told us, that unity among brethren, is not only good or advantageous; but is also *pleasant*. “Behold,” said he, in the hundred thirty-third psalm, “how good, and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity.” Can a lovelier scene, indeed, be exhibited on earth? Can we conceive of any thing more perfect, than a band of christians, cordially united, in principles, affection, and noble views? An association, in which the highest source of each one’s pleasure, the first object of his ambition, is to please his Lord and Saviour, and promote the interests of his church. “Such a society is a true epitome of the church triumphant.” Happiness is its reward; for “the happiness of one becomes the happiness of all.”

Contrast this scene, with a scene of discord, clashing views and interests, and reciprocal enmity. How amiable, how pleasing, does the former appear; how deformed, how disgusting the latter!

Justly, therefore, did the psalmist make the beautiful exclamation, which has just been repeated to you.

Influenced by its truth, and by the excellency of union, can we avoid saying, with the late pious Bishop Horne; when commenting on the whole psalm; "O come the day, when division shall cease, and enmity be done away; when the tribes of the spiritual Israel shall be united in a bond of eternal charity, under the true David, in the Jerusalem which is above; and saints and angels shall sing this lovely psalm together."

The topics proposed having been discussed, I shall now, in addition to the arguments, which have already been used, respectfully urge upon you the duty of complying with the apostle's injunction. But, while I perform this office, I am far from intending to intimate, that, in the respectable body now convened, any thing has occurred to give occasion for such exhortation. On the contrary, it is with much pleasure I declare, that a greater degree of unanimity has seldom prevailed among the members of any religious body, especially when convened from parts so remote from each other. The exhortation, therefore, must be understood as intended rather to excite to greater unanimity, than to dissuade from any discord, which may be supposed to exist.

Of the fitness, the advantages, and the amiableness of unanimity, among the ministers of Christ, especially among those of the same communion, you, my reverend fathers and brethren, can have but one opinion. But, though this is the fact; though, as a happy means, in re-

ducing this opinion into practice, we should entertain the same sentiments, on doctrines, discipline, and mode of worship; though we should think alike on the subject of canons and usages; yet, in the diversity of opinions, relative to matters of mere expediency; on the unexpected frustration of our favourite plans; in the moments, when our irascible passions are excited, by the hasty or unguarded expressions of our brethren, the best of us are so apt to lose sight of the principles, which should govern a religious association, and to suffer a spirit of contention to arise, that frequent admonitions to unanimity and brotherly love, are not only not unnecessary, but, indeed, exceedingly useful. Permit me, therefore, to call to your recollection, the precepts of the holy religion, which we profess, and of which we are public teachers. Do they not explicitly forbid us "to look at our own good alone," to be influenced by selfishness, ambition, and a spirit of contention? Do they not, on the contrary, teach us "to let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but, in lowliness of mind, to let each esteem others better than himself,"—"to be perfectly joined in the same mind and in the same judgment;"—"to stand fast, indeed, in one spirit?" Are we not told by St. Paul, that "charity suffereth long and is kind; that charity envieth not; that charity vaunteth not itself; is not puffed up; seeketh not her own; and is not easily provoked?" Do we not also constantly pray, in our excellent liturgy, that christians "may hold the faith, in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life?" If therefore we would act consistently with our profession, as christians; and our high and responsible stations in the church; let us sincerely and firmly resolve, with divine aid, to counteract that propensity to selfishness,

which is so predominant in our nature ; and, in all our public deliberations, to keep only in view, the glory of our Lord and Master, and the best interests of his church. The effect of this, would necessarily be, union and peace. Can we then for a moment hesitate, as to the adoption of resolutions, so just and so obligatory in themselves, and so productive of good ? If we desire, that unanimity may prevail in the congregations, “over which the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers,” can we deliberate, whether we shall, by mutual self denial, and forbearance, set them the example ? To us they look up, and very justly, for a pattern of every virtue. If they do not find it, can we complain, or be disappointed, that our instructions and admonitions are ineffectual ? Let us not then, by neglecting *our* duty, afford them an excuse for continuing in sin, or for disturbing the peace and harmony of the church. To say more would be superfluous. Our own sense of duty, the importance and responsibility of our offices, and the amiableness and advantages of the great virtue, which is now inculcated, will doubtless induce us, to use all our efforts, under God, for its preservation and promotion.

To you, my respected brethren of the laity, may I be permitted to suggest, that the obligations to unanimity are not less binding upon you than upon us. If it be our duty, as “dispensers of the divine word, and examples to the flock, to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace ;” it is not less your duty to use your best exertions for the same good purpose. Let me entreat you, therefore, cordially to unite with us, in the cultivation of harmony in the church. Among other means for this important purpose, let me prevail on you to discountenance all innovations, or departures from her rubricks, or estab-

lished usages ; every thing, indeed, which produces dissimilarity between different congregations, and consequently tends to division. Reflect on the happy consequences of a coincidence of sentiments among members of the same religious communion, and discourage every thing, which will tend to interrupt it. Let no personal dislike, temporary displeasure, or consideration of interest, prompt you to put at hazard the harmony, which should always prevail among the disciples of Christ.

Pursuing this course, you will give dignity and influence to our church, and enjoy the sweet satisfaction, which arises from the consciousness of endeavouring to promote her interest and peace, and the glory of our blessed Lord.

Finally, brethren, whether members of other sections of the christian church, or of the one which worships in this temple, give heed to the admonition of the apostle, in the text, and endeavour, in imitation of the primitive christians, “to be of one heart and one soul.” “Let nothing,” I repeat the words of the apostle, “be done, through strife, or vain glory ; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than himself:” and may the God of peace so bless our endeavours for this purpose, that all who behold our church, may be induced to exclaim, in the beautiful words of the psalmist, “behold, how good, and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity !”

FINIS.



